Optional Features for Outdoor Learning Areas

Solid Wastes and Composting

Description – Through effective solid waste management, schools can greatly reduce their contribution to local landfills. On the inside, schools can recycle and reuse paper, metal, and other materials to reduce their impact on forests and waterways. On the outside, schools can provide receptacles for disposing of litter appropriately, install recycling centers from local landfill operations, and compost schoolyard waste. Compost piles return humus for outside gardens and greenhouses and reduce solid waste.

Size – A compost pile needs to be at least two square yards in size, or may have several bins for sorting by decomposition.

Location – Locate waste receptacles near heavily traveled areas and playgrounds. Recycling centers should be located for easy access by vehicles. Compost piles should be located in a sunny area that has easy access to gardens and landscaping. Containers for gathering cafeteria scraps should be located close to kitchen exit doors.

Materials Needed – Composting can be done in a trench, in a commercial barrel, or in homemade areas set aside with cinder blocks or fencing. Most anything that was once growing is fair game for composting, However, meat and meat products as well as dog and cat manure should not go into compost areas. Cafeteria vegetable and fruit scraps and fresh yard waste are high in nitrogen. Dried leaves and twigs are high in carbon. Grass clippings, straw, livestock manure, sawdust, shredded paper, and coffee grounds may be safely added to make compost. Microorganisms are the workhorses. As a compost pile heats up, microorganisms break it down, and it turns to rich soil. A pitchfork for turning, a shovel for gathering humus, and a wheelbarrow for distributing the humus to appropriate areas in the landscape are tools for basic composting.

Labor Needed –Install a commercial composter or section off a portion of the schoolyard with cinder blocks or fencing. Purchase and place attractive cans or barrels for disposing of litter. Arrange for the local landfill operation to install a recycling container. Earthworms will do most of the labor in the compost pile!

Technical Assistance – Contact your local landfill for supplying the recycling center. Area soil and conservation districts and solid waste management offices are available for planning and implementing the project. See **http://weba.ky.gov/genericsearch/LicenseSearch.asp?AGY=17** for offices in your county.

Maintenance – Composting of grass clippings and dry leaves can be done with no maintenance, if you are short on time, or you have little yard waste. Once the style of composter is created for your application, the compost will need to be turned every two weeks or so. Compost piles get thirsty during dry seasons. You may need to water the compost to keep it moist and during particularly dry periods, you may need to cover it with a tarp.

Challenges – Compost piles may have a strong odor. Avoid the use of diseased plants, meat scraps, and dog or cat manure that may carry disease. Trouble shooting tips:

- If the compost pile does not heat up, check the moisture and add more green material.
- If the compost pile begins to smell bad, poke air holes with a rake or garden tool handle and turn the pile.

- If the compost is slow to break down, chop and shred larger pieces.

- Kentucky Division of Waste Management Education Resources
http://www.waste.ky.gov/educat/

- Kentucky Division of Waste Management Fact Sheets
http://www.waste.ky.gov/factsheets/